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ABSTRACT

Students and faculty of the New City School are housed in a single open room of a reconditioned building in an industrial area of St. Paul. Students come from St. Paul's neighborhood high schools, night school, and Open School. They may attend a nine-week session in the morning or afternoon for 2 1/2 hours. The eleven permanent staff members are assisted by a host of community volunteers, ranging from community members attending a neighborhood storefront college to a consultant experienced in making movies and videotapes. The curriculum is designed to encourage personal responsibility for individual actions and to provide a situation where there are real consequences to student choices and actions. Programs are offered in three major areas: 1) The People's Co-op, which focuses on community involvement; 2) Mass Media/TV Workshop, designed to provide students with the necessary scientific tools to understand the environment and to instill in them a social commitment to use such tools in attempting to solve environmental problems. Each student who enters the School chooses which course of study he will pursue. After the first week, he writes his personal goals for the course. The student and teacher together review these goals and evaluate progress toward reaching them. (JLB)

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The New City School

"I want to know how state institutions are run, how they are funded, and how they have progressed. I do not necessarily mean institutions, but anything having to do with mental retardation. My goals are to be able to relate for the sake of reaching people, not because I feel they need this. I guess I really want to be able to cope and act, instead of just coping. The knowledge I can gain can be so helpful in working with anyone or even picking an occupation. I want to learn to evaluate myself."

Student's goals for the People's Co-op

"Fourth week – Wednesday: I have finally distinguished the difference between the State Board of Welfare and Commissioner of Public Welfare and their roles in providing for the mentally handicapped and the role of the County Board. Praise the Lord! Without this information, it's too confusing to put things into their perspective. So now I guess it will be easier to collect more meaningful knowledge. I still feel anxious."

Student's Weekly log

The New City School is an experiment in social education. It is located in one large room on the third floor of a reconditioned building in the heart of an industrial area of downtown St. Paul, Minnesota. Courses in environmental studies, media, and community involvement thrive on the students' diverse racial, cultural, and political backgrounds. The curriculum is designed to encourage personal responsibility for individual actions and to provide a situation where there are real consequences to student choices and actions.

Students at the New City School come from St. Paul's neighborhood high schools, night school, and Open School. They may attend in the morning or afternoon for 2½ hours. A session lasts for nine weeks. They remain in their home school for the other half day and for the rest of the school year. Each nine weeks, approximately 220 students are served – half in the morning and half in the afternoon. In one year's time, between 800 and 1,000 of St. Paul's student population has the opportunity of attending the New City School.

Sandell, Teacher Coordinator of the New City School, notes: "Nine weeks isn't very long. It isn't long enough for us to change attitudes or values or ways of life. It's only a chance to offer students a look at a school where people from all over the city are able to exchange ideas and experiences, learn, argue, and cooperate with others from backgrounds more diverse than any one of the city's neighborhoods can offer. Each student benefits from a faculty which represents different professional backgrounds and ideas. Free from space and time requirements, the classes can find the places, people, and things they think it's necessary to learn from."

ORIGINS OF THE NEW CITY SCHOOL

George Young, Superintendent of St. Paul Public Schools, was faced with the major problem of desegregation when he began his job in 1970. He was determined to maintain quality education while providing students, parents, and teachers with choices in educational programs. Young met with neighborhood groups and professional organizations and suggested a series of schools with special programs. Under this plan, each school would draw students from the entire city, thus getting away from culturally ethnocentric, or racially and economically homogeneous, neighborhoods. A committee of interested citizens recommended two learning centers – one in performing arts and the other in social studies. They noted that social studies needed an impetus for development of innovation within the schools and that such a learning center could provide the impetus. Thus, the New City School was born.

Navaho poets visit the humanities class

Media class films a Charlie Chaplin movie in the restaurant next door to school

Film class working in the park across the street from school

Ecologist points out information about an area along the Mississippi River

WHERE IT HAPPENS

Students and faculty of the New City School are housed in a single open room. It's a big room—nearly 6,000 square feet. The ecology lab, library, staff office, workshop for building and repairing camping equipment, and classroom are all in the room; activities in each take place simultaneously. Only a darkroom and recording studio for the media program are separate from the rest.

But learning activities don't take place in just this room. The real classroom for the New City School is as big as St. Paul and its immediate environs. Students work in the surrounding countryside as well as in the entire city. The ecology class uses the wilderness areas of Minnesota within a 150-mile radius as its classroom, in addition to the parks, streams, and highways of the city.

The building space is shared with a manufacturing firm, radio station, bar, artists' studios, shops, and shoppers. Cooperation from students and staff is required to make the sharing work. "We think the circumstances encourage understanding, personal responsibility, and mutual respect. Schools separate and isolated from the activities of the community reinforce young people's feelings of isolation," says Sandell.

STAFF

There are eleven permanent staff members at the New City School. Steve Sandell serves as a teacher and program coordinator; the other ten serve as teachers in the various programs. They are assisted by a host of community volunteers, ranging from community members attending a neighborhood storefront college to a consultant experienced in making movies and videotapes

The consultants are paid by the St. Paul schools, either as instructors or consultants—whatever is considered appropriate for the amount of time and help they give. Some consultants work for an entire nine-week period, some for two hours a week, and some only when needed. Sandell is currently writing a proposal to the Minnesota State Department Council on Quality Education for funds to pay consultants full- or part-time, so they may take a leave of absence from their regular job to work with the New City School. When the need for a particular talent is identified, Sandell scours the city until he finds someone willing to work with the school who can fill the bill.

Although the major course offerings of the New City School are in social studies, staff members hold certificates in English, biology, and physical education as well as social studies. They are thus equipped to provide the students with the diverse skills and knowledge required by the program and to provide individual programs for each student. Programs are offered in three major areas.

THE PEOPLE'S CO-OP

The Co-op focuses on community involvement. Students spend time with a teacher in a class perhaps a day or two a week. The rest of their time is spent in personal involvement in some phase of community life. Activities might include working as a tutor or an aide in a grade school or in a day care project; organizing an internship with legal aid, the county welfare department, the crisis intervention center, or the housing and redevelopment authority; or developing a medical service for teenagers.

Three major courses make up the People's Co-op; they are Public Service TV, humanities, and future studies. Students who select the People's Co-op may choose one of the three. The Public Service TV network class currently includes 13 students, one teacher, and six community adults. They are developing a model for public service TV which can be implemented by St. Paul and other communities when cable TV is introduced. The class goes anywhere in St. Paul where something worth filming for public information purposes is happening. In addition to learning basic concepts of TV photography, the students learn to identify and describe newsworthy events.

The humanities class spends two days a week in class and three days a week actually performing various humanities projects—writing prose and poetry, painting, sculpturing, and acting. Volunteer professional writers and artists work with the sutdents to help them with their performances.

The third course in the People's Co-op is called "On Beyond City." It is a study of the city, of the people who don't like it, and of the people who want to change it and make it better. Students study their own relationship to the city, people in the city with power, and people affected by suburban growth and inner-city decay.

Courses in the People's Co-op are designed to emphasize the implications of a multi-racial society and the importance of the individual in an impersonal and technological world.

MASS MEDIA/TV WORKSHOP

As the Public Service TV network is designed to teach the importance of television as a vehicle for communicating public affairs to the community, so the

Mass Media TV Workshop is designed to provide a communications service for the New City School. Three teachers conduct this class: a teacher certified in English and social studies, an actor, and a professional photographer. Students study all phases of still and motion picture photography and video taping. The humanities class may be conducting a discussion they want video-taped or may have written a script they would like to have produced. They can then call on the TV Workshop to do the photography for them. Recently, students in the workshop assisted the ecology class by putting the camera lens into a series of microscopes on which were mounted slides of water samples taken from various bodies of water in the St. Paul area. They were able to photographically preserve data on the slides for later study.

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Approximately 40 students take environmental studies each semester. The five instructors for this class represent the fields of biology/physics, ecology, English, social studies, and physical education. All have extensive experience in outdoor education, camping skills, and ecology.

The environmental studies course is designed to provide students with the necessary scientific tools to understand the environment and to instill in them a social commitment to use such tools to do something about environmental problems.

Student activities are the same in winter as they are in the spring and fall. Students take four overnight camping trips and one five-day trip. They begin with the overnights so they can get to know one another and practice beginning outdoor camping skills. During this time, they work in the ecology laboratory on a problem which they have identified. Students taking the course in the first semester of 1972-73 did a study of streams, lakes, and rivers. One group developed blueprints and built a stream in the classroom. Another developed the marine biology for the stream and identified the various animals and organisms living in and around it. On their camping trips, the students collected samples from streams, lakes, and rivers and used this information to further develop their classroom project.

In addition to studying ecological interdependence, students are learning to live as a community and to experience personal interdependence.

PROGRESS EVALUATION

Each student who enters the New City School chooses which course of study he will pursue. After the first week, he writes his personal goals for the course. Sometimes the student writes very demanding goals; sometimes they seem frivolous. A teacher reviews the goals with the student, encouraging him to be as demanding as possible. Together, they clarify the student-stated goals and occasionally the teacher may add to them. Within two weeks, the student writes down what he thinks his progress is, the teacher does the same, and together they evaluate achievement in reaching the stated goals. This process is repeated two or three times during the nine weeks. At the end of the nine-week period, the same procedure is followed, and the student then gives himself a letter grade.

Each student also fills out a weekly summary of experiences, projects, and special programs. This summary is used by the student and teacher to help in their assessment of the student's progress.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

To date no effort has been made to conduct an outside evaluation of the New City School; however, an informal questionnaire was administered by school district personnel to all students attending the center the first year. Such questions as "Do you like going to the learning center?", "Have you made friends with someone from another school?", and "Do you like going to a school which is racially and culturally mixed?" were asked. The majority of students gave positive responses to such questions. However, Sandell is concerned about developing an evaluation which would indicate whether the New City School is pursuing and reaching criteria defined by the staff. He would like to answer questions such as "Are the students really having a legitimate voice in the conduct of the school?", "Do students recognize that there are consequences to their actions?", and "What have students learned, cognitively and affectively?" Sandell is currently working on the format for such an evaluation and hopes to have it completed soon.

IMPACT AND THE FUTURE

"Our concern now is that we have an impact on the neighborhood schools and on the communities they serve," says Sandell. Students who return to their neighborhood schools after a nine-week stint at the New City School have a new outlook on education and what it should be; this outlook often influences students' goals at their neighborhood schools, and leads them to suggest different ways of reaching goals to their teachers and administrators. "But that's not a very realistic way to achieve major changes in the schools," says Sandell. "It will

Late winter snowshoeing and ecology experiment in wilderness ecology

High school student serves as tutor in Roosevelt School's bi-lingual kindergarten

Environmental Studies class starts out on a five-day trip along the icy Canadian border

For more information concerning the subject of this paper,

WRITE:

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for:

Statement of Behavioral Objectives and Teaching Criteria; further information on the organization of the New City School.

READ:

Changing Schools. (An Occasional Newsletter). %Robert Barr, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana 47401 ($3 a year).

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ED 055 933 – The Human Relations School - MF $.65, HC $3.29

ED 058 122 – Alternative Schools: A Practical Manual - MF $.65, HC $6.58

ED 064 787 – Evaluation and Authority in Alternative Schools and Public Schools - MF $.65, HC $3.29

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take a while to change students' attitudes toward their home schools, and it's going to take a while, too, for their schools to accept new student attitudes. What I'm anxious to do is to have workshops for teachers from the neighborhood schools to show them what we do here and how we do it."

Sandell proposes a rotating staff, with only one or two permanent positions. Teachers would come from the neighborhood schools for a one-year period, or perhaps for just a quarter. They would have a chance to try out things which could not be tried in the traditional school setting because of time, space, or budget limitations. Such a plan would enable teachers to develop models for alternative social studies programs, work out the bugs in the alternative school setting, and return to their neighborhood schools to implement the models for many more students.

In the meantime, the New City School is working successfully for the students who attend each nine weeks. One student stated her goals as follows: "I would like to receive a better understanding of how people live and think, besides the ways I know and have been brought up with. I'd also like to learn in what ways people are helping and hurting the world, and in what way I can help as I get older and must start my career." In her weekly log, she states: "This week at the learning center was different from all other places I've ever been. We went to the Union Gospel Mission to find ways of helping people by being involved. These ways were effective because they were in a different environment." And in her final evaluation, she states: "I learned so much about how other people live and what the community has to offer. I also learned a lot more about the actions of people and why they do what they do. You could tell the teacher cared a lot about what he did. At first I thought he was forcing us, but soon realized he cared and was trying to help us make the most out of the nine weeks here."

TEACHING CRITERIA

In place of specific behavioral objectives for the school, the staff has developed criteria to be applied to all teaching activities. The criteria for teaching activities are as follows:

"Teaching should provide activities which:

1. Permit students to make informed choices after considering a selection of alternatives, carry out their choices, and reflect on the consequences and implications of the choices.
2. Assign active roles for students rather than passive ones, emphasizing the student's importance and the consequences of his personal actions.
3. Engage in questioning ideas and the application of intellectual processes to personal or social problems. Student inquiry should concern ideas such as truth, justice, self-worth; and involve testing hypotheses, identifying assumptions, creating original works, and communicating personal ideas and emotions.
4. Involve students in touching, handling, applying, and manipulating real objects.
5. Involve students in activities that may successfully by accomplished at several different levels of ability and where diversity is evidently valuable, e.g., imagining, comparing, classifying, summarizing.
6. Ask students to build on a previous experience, examine an idea in a new setting, and apply an intellectual process to a new situation.
7. Require examination of topics or issues often ignored by the media, texts, or educational projects: personal values, individual worth, personal accomplishment, friendship, love, transactional analysis, self-concept, and social responsibility.
8. Involve students and teachers in risk-taking, where ideas, skills, convictions, and actions assume the responsibility of success or failure.
9. Require rewriting, rehearsal, and polishing of the student's initial effort. The idea that an activity, task or assignment is finished when completed is unsatisfactory. Experiences ought to suggest that one's efforts are approximations of what they may be.
10. Apply and master meaningful standards, rules, disciplines, and skills, using standards derived from students as well as teachers.
11. Share the planning and responsibility for and implementation of ideas. Individuals should recognize the importance of cooperation, the social contract, and the consequences of their individual actions in a group effort.
12. Illustrate the relevance of the effort.
13. Put students in responsible contact with teachers and peers of different backgrounds, ideas, and understandings.
14. Suggest curriculum innovation appropriate for implementation in neighborhood school programs of social education."